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NSC hardliner out of key policy post

By Gus Constantine
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The highest-ranking specialist on Latin American affairs at the White House has been eased out of his post, a Reagan administration official said yesterday.

Constantine Menges, who has held the title of senior director for Latin America at the National Security Council, is now serving the White House in a different directorate, the administration official said.

Mr. Menges is regarded as one of the staunchest conservative advisers to President Reagan and has advocated a firm anti-communist stand in Central America during policy debates within the administration. Raymond F. Burghardt, a career foreign service officer, who joined the NSC as director of the Latin American Affairs section about a year ago, is replacing Mr. Menges in the key policy position.

Mr. Burghardt has now assumed the duties of senior director.

Mr. Menges, while remaining a special adviser to the president, will be operating out of the Directory of International Communications and Diplomacy.

That job is to explain U.S. policies and decisions abroad, the administration source said.

The Reagan adviser will also drop a notch in title from senior director to director. Walter Raymond heads the diplomacy operation as senior director.

White House officials would not comment on why the shift took place, nor would they confirm or deny suggestions that there might be policy implications in the shift.

As a senior White House official, Mr. Menges has fought vigorously for conservative positions inside the NSC but has followed the traditional practice of keeping out of the public limelight.

The one departure from this practice came last January when he told a group of congressional aides flatly that the Soviet Union "used the Bulgarians to shoot the pope."

It has been the only time any high Reagan administration publicly linked the Bulgarians to the May 1981 assassination attempt against Pope John Paul II.

The congressional aides had been visiting the White House for a briefing on Central America.

Asked to compare Mr. Menges and his replacement at the key Central America post, one administration source said he doubts there are any substantial differences in viewpoint between Mr. Burghardt and Mr. Menges.

The source said Mr. Menges might be "inclined to throw firebombs around the room a bit," whereas Mr. Burghardt is more prone to working within the bureaucracy.

But he described Mr. Burghardt as a solid conservative who is very close to John Negroponte, until recently U.S. ambassador to Honduras.

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